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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the concepts of strategic planning, assessment, and Total Quality Management fit together and relate to one another in the field of higher education. Central to the explanation of how these topics are related is the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen, a driving force behind the quality improvement movement in that country. The paper gives special attention to the need to change institutional cultures in order to improve achievement of institutional goals, a central tenet of Kaizen. The concepts of Kaizen are discussed within the context of improving higher education administration, particularly the management of student learning, the focus of student outcomes assessment. A basic hypothesis of the paper is that the historical pattern in American higher education has reflected the western, innovation approach while a more gradual, Kaizen approach is better suited for the current economic and social environment. A comparison is made of the innovation approach to solving problems and the Kaizen approach to change. Contains 12 references. (GLR)

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Kaizen and the Art of University Administration

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Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications
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Kaizen and the Art of University Administration

Abstract

The paper ties together the seemingly disparate, yet related, concepts of strategic planning, assessment, and TQM or Total Quality Management. Central to the explanation of how these topics are related is the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen, a driving force behind the quality improvement movement in that country. Special attention is given in the paper to the need to change institutional cultures in order to improve achievement of institutional goals, a central tenet of Kaizen and one which has been highlighted in higher education recently by the work of Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991).

Introduction

Topics such as strategic planning, assessment, and TQM have been widely discussed in higher education circles in recent years and have found their way into the programs of many professional meetings, including the AIR Forum. A confusing aspect of this trend, however, is the lack of explanation as to how all of these concepts fit together or relate to each other. There appears to be the need for an explanation of a unifying philosophy that ties together these distinct, yet seemingly related, terms. What is needed in particular is a description of how all of this can be applied in a practical way to improving the management of colleges and universities.

The concept of Kaizen, which emphasizes continuous, gradual improvement as opposed to making major changes, provides a sound basis for pulling together the key concepts of strategic planning, assessment and TQM. (TQI, or Total Quality Improvement, is a term preferred by many over the more commonly used TQM.) Assessment of student learning, as an example, seems to be most successful when faculty, students, administrators, and staff work together to identify and improve all aspects of the learning process. (A primary principle of TQM/TQI is to examine all aspects of a situation; some apparently unimportant matters can cause major and unnecessary frustrations if not addressed.)

Such information gathered in a thorough assessment process can and should be used in strategic planning at the department and the institutional levels. Gradual changes should occur in the content and structure of the curriculum as well as within the courses themselves. Inevitably, interactions with other academic and administrative units have to be addressed due to their impact on the department's students; teamwork with those both inside and outside of the department is required. Slowly and gradually the institutional culture evolves into one more sensitive to better ways to maximize student learning. A total quality improvement process focused on student learning is consequently in place, whether it is called that or not.

There is growing body of knowledge about all of the concepts related to strategic planning, assessment, and TQM/TQI. While much of it has come from the management literature initially, a great deal of attention is being given in the education literature now as well. What follows is an attempt to focus on one aspect of TQM/TQI which has had less attention in the education literature and to describe how the basic concepts of Kaizen might be applied in postsecondary education.

Literature Review

The philosophy of Kaizen is developed with examples by Imai (1986). While the book itself is aimed at applications of Kaizen in the

business world and especially in manufacturing, the principles outlined by Imai are applicable to higher education. Examples of such applications are provided in the following section.

The subject of assessment, and in particular student outcomes assessment, has received a great deal of attention in recent years. The requirement by the U.S. Government that outcomes assessment measures must be utilized by accrediting agencies in order for them to be recognized, and thus for the institutions accredited by them to be permitted to receive federal student financial aid, has provided a strong impetus to what was already occurring at the state level in many states. Ewell (1988) provides one of the best summaries available on the subject of student outcomes assessment. His earlier book (1985) remains a good introduction to the topic as well and takes more of a case study approach. Astin (1985) provides a logical argument as to why the traditional ways of defining excellence by dependence on input measures lacks validity.

Broader than the topic of student outcomes assessment, strategic planning involves the evaluation of opportunities in the external environment and the matching of these to internal interests and capabilities. Cope (1981) remains one of the better sources of information on this topic. As Gardiner (1989) points out, a major effort in strategic planning is the refinement of mission statements, goals, and objectives at the department as well as

institutional level. Both assessment and the broader strategic planning effort of which it is a part depend first and foremost internally on clear understandings of departmental and institutional strengths and weaknesses as described in mission statements and accompanying goals and objectives.

Good introductions to the application of TQM/TQI principles in higher education are provided by Chaffee (1991), Marchese (1991), Seymour (1991, 1992), and by Sherr and Teeter (1991). Imai's book on Kaizen (1986) describes many of the philosophical underpinnings of the Total Quality Management/Total Quality Improvement movement and provides a number of practical examples in manufacturing. The following utilizes the concepts of Kaizen to show how they apply to improving higher education administration, particularly the management of student learning which is the focus of student outcomes assessment.

Applying Kaizen in Higher Education

An example of how Kaizen can be applied to postsecondary education can be seen in the table below, which is an adaption from Imai (p. 24). In the original table, Imai describes some differences between the Kaizen approach to quality improvement and the innovation approach which has been predominant in Western manufacturing systems. A basic hypothesis of this paper is that the historical pattern in American higher education has reflected

the Western, innovation approach while a more gradual, Kaizen approach is better suited for the current economic and social environment.

A Comparison of Kaizen and
Innovation Approaches to Change

	Kaizen	Innovation
1. Effect	Long-term and long-lasting but undramatic	Short-term but dramatic
e.g.,	Long-term, cyclical, marginal changes in existing curricula	New programs developed for specific short-term purposes or clienteles, then abandoned when demand ceases
2. Pace	Small steps	Big steps
e.g.,	Small, gradual improvements in programs	"Do it right or don't do it at all" attitude

3. Timeframe	Continuous and incremental	Intermittent and non-incremental
e.g.,	Continuous with special attention at points in the assessment cycle	Stop/Go/Stop/Go decision patterns; intense evaluation at points in time (e.g., during Self-Study) with little or no interest otherwise.
4. Change	Gradual and constant	Abrupt and volatile
e.g.,	Gradual responsiveness to internal and external information	Major program additions, deletions, or changes followed by inattention
5. Involvement	Everybody	Select few "champions"
e.g.,	Entire faculty and staff; sample or all students	A few top administrators; micro-management from the top

6. Approach	Collectivism, group efforts, systems approach	Rugged individualism, individual ideas and efforts
e.g.,	Collegial	Bureaucratic or entrepreneurial
7. Mode	Maintenance and improvement	Scrap and rebuild
e.g.,	Gradual improvement	New people/programs to replace existing people/programs
8. Spark	Conventional know-how and state of the art	Technological breakthroughs, new inventions, new theories
e.g.,	Information gathered through periodic activities	Hot new ideas over out-of-fashion ones; grand gestures

9. Practical requirements	Requires little investment but great effort to maintain it	Requires large investment but little effort to maintain it
e.g.,	Little incremental financial investment; substantial time investment to get started and to maintain	Large financial costs for beginning new programs; little short-term benefit from eliminating existing ones; personnel problems, especially in program elimination
10. Effort orientation	People	Technology
e.g.,	Utilize existing people primarily; some research and technology	Add new people and/or replace existing ones where possible; emphasis on technological solutions

9

11. Evaluation criteria	Process and efforts for better results	Results for profits
e.g.,	Performance measures; satisfaction measures	Appearance of responsiveness to needs/ opportunities; form over substance
12. Advantage	Works well in slow-growth economy	Better suited to fast-growth economy
e.g.,	Works with limited resources; positioned well to compete for additional resources when available	Works well in fast growth environment with little need for existing program elimination or reduction

Integrating the Kaizen Approach

The history of postsecondary education in the U.S., especially since World War II, has been one of growth and increasing influence generally. A few colleges and universities have suffered

enrollment declines or even closed altogether, but nationally the trend has been one of growth in students and financial resources. Recently, due to budget constraints, many institutions have been asked to do a better job of educating more students with only slightly more or even fewer financial resources. The "do more with less" environment, which seems to be commonplace in other countries also, is one that is well suited to the Kaizen approach to gradual improvement.

As the previous table shows, the innovation approach to solving problems is better suited to the prior era of growth in resources than the current one of pressures to restrain costs. The rugged individualism and short-term planning characteristic of the innovation approach to change seem to fit traditional American culture better also; performance in the for-profit corporate sector has provided numerous, publicized examples of this in recent years. It is expected that higher education in the U.S. reflects the values of the society, especially since so many of the governing boards of our colleges and universities are composed of corporate executives and other professionals from outside of academia.

The current era of constraints, however, provides an opportunity to integrate some of what has been learned about improving products and services in other areas of the society, both for-profit and non-profit. Those same board members, legislators, and other external supporters of higher education have been forced by

international competition to focus on the customer and to reconsider the innovation approach to quality improvement. They seem to be asking those of us in colleges and universities to do the same. In fact, the tradition of flat organization structures in academe, where faculty in particular have a lot of control over the operation of the institution, is more amenable to the adoption of a Kaizen approach than many hierarchical organizations in industry and government.

The assessment movement of the past 5-10 years has been identified primarily with the evaluation of student learning, particularly undergraduate learning. Commonly assessment is driven by a state mandate or the expectations of a regional or disciplinary accrediting group; that is to say, they are frequently externally rather than internally driven. At their worst, institutional assessment processes add up to no more than perfunctory reporting of some data from standardized tests and/or student opinion surveys. At their best, however, faculty and staff have used an assessment mandate as an opportunity to examine in a serious and profound way the entire educational process, including the environment in which it takes place. Periodic assessment cycles, typically of five years or so, are developed to allow thoughtful consideration of the most basic issues: What are we trying to achieve? How are we measuring success? What have we done with the results to improve student learning? An extremely wide variety of approaches have been developed and utilized at very disparate

institutions, with substantial success in many cases.

The sound assessment efforts, when examined closely, appear to use most of the concepts outlined in the previous table. A range of faculty, staff, students, alumni, employers, and other "customers" are involved (#5, #6, and #10 above). The long-term, cyclical nature puts the focus on continuous improvement (#1 and #3). The changes that occur as a result of assessment are not usually big ones; gradual improvement of existing curricula that are basically sound is the typical result (#2 and #4). Relatively simple, straightforward techniques for gathering data are reported (#8 and #9). The basic assumption is that things are going well, but there is always room for improvement (#11). Lack of additional resources, while providing barriers, is not used as an excuse for inaction (#12). Program improvement, rather than looking for scapegoats to blame, is the basic approach (#7). In short, when it is properly done, assessment is the implementation of TQM principles to improve student learning both inside and outside the classroom. While most of the successful applications reported in the TQM literature in higher education are in non-academic administrative support areas, many in the assessment arena have been practicing TQM principles, often without an awareness of TQM as such.

The link to strategic planning has to do with the goal setting and measurement processes employed in assessment and TQM. If a unit,

whether instructional or support, is listening to its "customers," it has a good idea of what the needs are. The data gathering activities provide measures for determining how well the needs are being met. It is likely also to reveal ways to improve performance, since customer groups are known to provide numerous suggestions. Consequently, assessment and TQM activities provide much of the information needed to do sound strategic planning.

Of course, a number of unit plans put together as a group do not necessarily constitute an institutional plan. An institutional level strategic planning process is required to set the tone and direction of the entire organization. The amount of information at lower levels are a rich source from which to draw information, however. Nevertheless, leadership is required in order to pull it all together into a coherent whole.

Discussion

The result of this kind of summary is to put several of these concepts into a context to help improve understanding of how they can be used by institutional researchers and others in higher education. Increased sensitivity to and awareness of the ways in which these concepts are interrelated, matched with increased understanding, should aid those at the operational level trying to make sense out of what often appear to be "buzz words."

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